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G/PM
(52) (86)

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Bernbaum

29 May 1963

To: G - Mr. Johnson

From: INR - Thomas L. Hughes

Subject: Public Position in the Event of Hostile Reaction
to Low Level Overflight of Cuba.

We foresee two possible contingencies: a situation in which a plane has been lost, and one in which hostile reaction has not downed an aircraft.

If a Plane Were Shot Down. If a plane were lost, we would assume that the fact would become publicly known. Our public response would:

1. Reaffirm our right and intention -- as a consequence of the OAS resolution and, more broadly, as a means of self defense against repetition of the deceptive Soviet missile deployment of last year -- to conduct reconnaissance over Cuba.
2. Re-establish a deterrent by announcing actions which had already been taken or of our intention to retaliate (whether by attacking air defense installations, or by reimposing a quarantine or some other appropriate sanction).

We believe that argumentation based on our need to
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verify Soviet indications that their withdrawals were more extensive than we realized would be more effective in private approaches to Moscow than in public statements.

✓ We note that it may well be impossible to tell whether a plane was lost through Soviet or Cuban action or a combination of both. Perforce we may have to keep our statements focused upon the incident rather than upon the relative guilt of the Soviet Union and Cuba. This emphasis will have the advantage of affording maximum freedom of action in subsequent dealings with both sides.

A Plane Fired Upon but Not Downed. In the event of firing which does not result in the loss of a plane, we might elect to say nothing, particularly if intelligence showed that the reaction was purely local or in contravention of existing Soviet or Cuban orders.

If, however, the effort to shoot down a plane was systematic and coordinated or if either the Soviets or the Cubans issued a public protest, we would wish to issue a statement which re-established a ^{our need and intention to continue} deterrent to hostile actions against our reconnaissance missions.

Attached are two preliminary drafts of contingency press statements to cover attack with and without loss of aircraft.

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ATTACK WITH LOSS OF AIRCRAFT OR CREW

Today a US reconnaissance aircraft was shot down over Cuba. The pilot is believed dead (alive). The US, with the full support of the OAS, has made it clear that surveillance of Cuba will be maintained until such time as Cuba ceases to be a threat to the peace and security of the hemisphere.

The President has therefore ordered that the following actions be taken to assure continuance of surveillance and to provide for full protection of pilots and crews engaged in these operations.

[List of Actions]

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ATTACK WITHOUT LOSS OF AIRCRAFT OR CREW

Today a US reconnaissance aircraft was fired upon over Cuba but returned safely with no casualties. The US Government, with the full support of the OAS, has made it clear that aerial surveillance of Cuba will be maintained until such time as Cuba ceases to be a threat to the peace and security of the hemisphere.

Appropriate action has therefore been taken to assure the continuance of surveillance and to provide full protection to pilots and crews engaged in these operations.

[If desirable, details of actions in progress or contemplated could be added.]

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